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Barrère-Maurisson, M.; Frinking, G.A.B.

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The Impact of Policies on the Division of Labour: A New Approach

WORC Paper 97.10.013/6

**Marie-Agnès Barrère-Maurisson
Gerard Frinking**

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R = 3

t = division of labour

V = unpaid work

V = domestic work

t = government policy

g = Europe

October, 1997

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THE IMPACT OF POLICIES ON THE DIVISION OF LABOUR: A NEW APPROACH

Marie-Agnès Barrère-Maurisson
Gerard Frinking

key words: family, division, work, policies, 'régulation'

Summary

There are considerable differences between most European countries in respect both of the division of labour within families and the policies that seek to influence that division. These policies are based, implicitly or explicitly, on assumptions about what constitutes an effective policy measure. However, little is known about how to measure the effects of such policies on the division of labour. Moreover, the emergence of a supranational political entity, i.e. the European Union, requires a new approach to the evaluation of national policies. In this article, the authors put forward a theoretical framework to be used in an international study of the effects of policies on the division of paid and unpaid work in EU member states. This proposed framework will be empirically tested in a research project to be conducted in the next few years by members of a European network of social scientists who have been working together since 1995.

Résumé

La plupart des pays Européens connaissent de grandes différences à l'égard de la division du travail professionnel et domestique entre hommes et femmes. En même temps nous constatons en Europe un grand écart entre les politiques qui sont mises en oeuvre, pour influencer cette division du travail. Dans cet article, les auteurs présenteront d'abord, en grandes lignes, les aspects théoriques de la division du travail. Ensuite, nous aborderons le rôle des politiques: comment peut-on évaluer l'impact des politiques respectives sur la division du travail? Cette question mérite d'être posé surtout à la suite de l'émergence d'une nouvelle entité politique: l'Union Européenne. Cette étude s'inscrit dans un projet international sur le rôle des politiques en matière de la division du travail qu'un groupe de chercheurs européens vient d'entamer. Ce réseau est formé en 1995 et s'est posé comme objectif d'étudier l'impact des politiques dans les pays membres de l'Union Européenne. Actuellement le projet se trouve dans la première phase de sa réalisation.

Introduction

Previous research on work and the family (Barrère-Maurisson and Marchand, 1990; Kempeneers and Lelièvre, 1991; Willemsen and Frinking, 1995) has revealed significant differences in patterns of work and family life in industrialised countries. It is becoming equally clear that there are also considerable differences between countries in respect of the policies put in place in an attempt to influence the division of labour within families.

At the same time, the societal context differs from country to country. For instance, current policies may or may not seek to encourage female labour force participation, to make it easier to reconcile family responsibilities and paid work or to persuade men to do more domestic work (to list just three possibilities).

All European countries have policies that influence patterns of paid work and family life. Whether explicitly or implicitly, these policies are based on assumptions about what constitutes effective policy. For instance, a common assumption is that the amount of paid work performed by women influences the amount of housework performed by men. This assumption is expressed almost literally in some policy statements. However, as is apparent from the available data for a few European countries, the situation is by no means as simple as that. In the Netherlands, for instance, husbands of full-time housewives spend more time on household work than husbands of women who work part-time (SCP, 1994). Another popular assumption is that gender segregation and the so-called 'glass ceiling' will vanish if women and men have equal levels of education. This assumption is not supported by the available data. Even in countries where both men and women are equally well educated and where there is a high level of female labour force participation, as for instance in Denmark and Finland, both horizontal and vertical segregation by sex persists.

Most of the research focuses on the unequal division of paid work between men and women. The asymmetric division of unpaid work is generally taken for granted. Moreover, the two are often analyzed separately. The former is primarily the domain of those interested in the labour market or the organisation of firms, while the second is usually approached from the perspective of the family. However, work affects the family and the family affects work. Thus, in order to take an holistic view, it is necessary to adopt a joint approach to the family and to work, whether paid or unpaid. This is the focus of the approach adopted here, which takes as its starting point the notion of the 'family division of labour' (Barrère-Maurisson, 1992).

In this article, we examine how policies affect the 'family division of labour'. We start with a brief overview of the main theoretical aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. We then focus on the kinds of policies that may influence the division of paid and unpaid work and the effects to be measured. The impact of these policies can be viewed from different perspectives, in accordance with a social or societal approach. In the first case, the impact of policies on the division of work can be studied on different levels: the micro (the family), the meso (the organisation) and the macro (society as a whole). One of our aims, for example, is to ascertain the extent to which families modify their division of paid and unpaid work as a result of policies put in place in the spheres of work and the family; this is an example of a micro-level study. In the second case, the aim is to integrate these different social approaches in order to construct the societal comparison that is required in order to understand the role of institutional factors, including the political system, in determining international differences in the division of work.

Finally, we will argue that integrating the social and societal approaches has certain advantages over a non-integrated approach, especially in a situation in which a new supranational authority is emerging, as in the European Union.

The family division of work: some theoretical aspects

In real life, the world of work and that of the family are constantly interacting with each other; as a result, it is logical, indeed essential, to study them in conjunction with one another. It follows from this that focusing on the relationship between work and the family will help us to illuminate the processes that produce that relationship and thus to understand why it varies in accordance with context.

A - Work and the family: the transformation of a relationship in both time and space

Since female labour force participation rates began to rise in recent decades, the interaction between work and the family has been the focus of considerable attention, particularly on the individual level. There is an extensive literature on what is described, variously, as the 'hard choices' (Gerson, 1985) or the 'dilemmas' (Frinking and Willemsen, 1997) of modern family life, particularly as they affect young women. For example, the labour force participation of most women in European countries still depends to a large extent on whether or not they have young children to care for.

Surveys conducted in large firms have also exposed the relationship between workers' occupational status and their family status, which is so close that particular

jobs are allocated to individuals with precisely defined family characteristics. Firms represent the world of paid work in the market sector; the other form of paid work, that located in the non-market sector, i.e. in the public services, is associated with different types of linkage between forms of family and types of career which in turn reflect the specific characteristics of the labour supply and the way in which it is managed. Finally, the last form of work, non-wage work, particularly in agriculture, is a good example of the match between work and family.

These analyses not only show the specificity of each sector of the economy in terms of the relationship between employment and family forms but also illuminate the points of overlap and fuzziness of the boundaries between categories. This is why it is necessary to reformulate our theoretical frameworks, and in particular to reconstruct our concepts of work and the family in order to redefine them in relation to each other. Thus work is regarded here as a combination of paid work and unpaid, domestic work, while the family constitutes the space within which that work is regulated (Barrère-Maurisson, 1992).

The principles underlying the relationship between work and the family operate in both time and space. Examination of developments in France over the past century or more shows how change has taken place over time by revealing a succession of different periods (and phases within each period), each one dominated by a particular form of relationship to work and type of family. Periodisation of this kind reveals the time-lags between the process of adaptation in the two spheres (productive and reproductive) and the processes of transition from one model to another. The variation in space relates to two different entities. The first is the social space, at all levels, from the particular (the individual and each social category) to the general (the sector and society as a whole), with the intermediate levels in between (groups, firms, organisations). Each level of the social space (a social category, for example) has particular forms of relationship between work and the family. Finally, by combining the two dimensions of time and space, it becomes possible to observe differences in the forms taken by that relationship at the societal level (i.e. between different societies). In this way, we have been able to compare two or more states (European OECD countries) by outlining the configurations that typify each country. This in turn reveals the internal coherence of each system, i.e. the way in which, in each system, the interaction between those elements relating to employment and those involving the family is regulated at the macro-social level (Barrère-Maurisson and Marchand, 1990).

In the final analysis, the relationship between work and the family emerges as a social process, in which individuals are allocated to particular jobs in accordance with their family situation. This is why we term the process 'the family division of labour'. And as such, it offers insights into the workings of society as a whole,

thereby enabling us to locate individuals in all the various dimensions of the reality in which they exist.

B - Epistemological, empirical and theoretical effects

Let us begin by looking at the question of the boundaries between fields and disciplines: to investigate the relationship between work and the family is to conceive of individuals, of actors, as functioning in both spheres at one and the same time, i.e. to regard them as part of both spheres at the same time. To recognise this is, therefore, to recognise the need to break down the boundaries between the various approaches in order to recast our theoretical constructs. The fundamental aim here is to abandon the separate approaches that lead only to fragmentation in order to adopt an holistic view of the individual actor. In other words, the reconstruction of the categories of everyday reality (with the individual actor located in a family and in a job) leads to a reconstruction of epistemological categories.

This is bringing us close to the debate being conducted between two schools, one emphasising the freedom of the actor and the other focusing on the influence of structures. Taking the notion of dynamic as a starting point, we shall attempt rather to show how, in each society, there is a high level of overall coherence but, at the same time, evolution, twists and turns and moves between categories. Such moves show how the actor (not only individuals, but also groups or even countries) can shift position, how his or her situation can change (by moving from one category to another, from one sector of the economy to another, or from one type of family to another). At the macrosocial level, this is the preliminary step in an approach to the process of social change.

Empirically, there are two elements to be taken into account. Firstly, the assertion that 'each job is allocated to an individual with specific family characteristics' indicates not only that there is a correspondence between types of family and types of career but also that, just as employers manage their workforces, so the family is 'managed' in some way. This management of the family is in fact the manifestation of the conjunction of employers' and employees' strategies, which in the latter case constitute their aspirations in terms both of the labour market and of family life. This in turn raises the very topical issue of social management (in contrast to strict economic management) and the reconciling of paid work and family life, of the private and public spheres.

Secondly, the assertion that 'there cannot be any economic change without a concomitant change in the family, and vice versa' reflects the correspondence between the dominant family form and the economic characteristics of any given

society. This provides the basis for comparison of the various societal forms of the relationship between work and the family, with each form constituting an historical and local specification of the relationship. Thus there is a correspondence between, for example, an 'historical' state of the regulatory processes at work in the labour market and a particular configuration of family structures. Adopting an approach of this kind may make us better able to understand the social issues that are important for the future of our societies, and in particular the future of our economies; it is frequently forgotten that what is happening at the level of the family is closely linked to a country's economy. Conversely, it may help us to understand the changes taking place in the family, the effects of which on labour market behaviour, particularly in terms of demographics, are difficult to foresee.

These redefinitions will have some effects at the theoretical level. The definition of work as a combination of two spheres, the world of work and that of the family, makes it possible to incorporate the family into the notion of work and thus of production. Furthermore, it enables us to make a real comparison of the situation of women at work (and not only in the family) with that of men, who are now regarded as belonging to the sphere of the family and not just to the world of work.

On the other hand, the definition of the family as the space in which work is regulated allows us to respond to certain theoretical concerns, particularly those relating to the question of family forms and their relationship to economic life. Firstly, it makes it possible to incorporate all forms of family, including modern, reconstituted families, irrespective of ties of kinship or marriage (single-parent families, unmarried people, etc.) Moreover, the notion of the 'type of relationship' between work and the family is distributed in two ways within the family: between the domestic sphere and the world of work, and between the man and the woman. This distribution of work, which operates in three main ways (no sharing, unequal sharing, equal sharing), makes it possible to distinguish between various types of family, since the same type of relationship could be at work in two different types of family.

Furthermore, the family form is defined as the dominant form of the family in a given historic period, i.e. as an historical configuration linked to particular economic, cultural and legal factors. As a result, three distinct forms of the family emerge:

- 1: the patriarchal form, based on the extended family, as exemplified by farming families in nineteenth-century France;
- 2: the conjugal form, based on the couple, as exemplified by the working-class family of the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries;
- 3: the two-breadwinner family, based on individuals, which is the form that is becoming widespread today.

These three forms may coexist during the same period: for example, conjugal families still exist in France today, even when both partners are working outside the home. Thus it is the notion of 'type of relationship' that will allow a distinction to be made between 'false' and 'genuine' two-breadwinner families: the 'genuine' ones are those families with two providers of equal status, while the others, those in which the two providers have unequal status, are still conjugal families (often because the woman works part time, or because one partner earns a secondary income). Moreover, this approach allows us to refine the statistical distribution of family types based on the labour force participation of family members (Barrère-Maurisson and Marchand, 1992).

As far as the notion of 'family division of labour' itself, it is well suited to analysis of the dynamic aspect of the relationship between work and the family because it relates to a real social process, namely the 'process whereby work is distributed in accordance with family situation'. This process was particularly clear in the case of the agricultural family, in other words in situations where there is a blurring of the distinction between work and the family, where indeed 'work is allocated in accordance with status within the family' (men worked in the fields, women worked in the farmyard and the home, while also managing the family's affairs). In this respect, it is true, we are close to Durkheim's notion of the division of labour. Here, however, the process of allocating work within the family is located in both the domestic sphere and the world of work, and at all levels of the social sphere (individuals, organisations, sectors of the economy) and, moreover, in both time and space.

Policies on reconciling work and family

In most European countries, policies intended to further the reconciliation of work and family have been proposed and implemented in order to create real equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women with family responsibilities. Corresponding measures can be found in a number of related policy areas, in particular:

- organisation of working time (flexible employment practices, maternity and paternity leave, care leave, career breaks);
- abolition of discrimination between men and women in the labour market (equal pay and equal treatment, affirmative action);
- development of adequately financed services for families (child care facilities, vouchers);

- adaptation of social security regimes and tax systems to the increasing diversity in work patterns (tax advantages for breadwinners);
- organisation of school time and curricula (staggering of holidays).

Although it is quite difficult to identify the precise objectives of these measures, since they often have more than one goal, it is true to say, nevertheless, that they are all intended to influence the division of work in families between men and women. However, there are differences in the expected outcomes of the various measures taken in the policy areas listed. In theory, we can distinguish between policies directed towards:

1) Working conditions, which may have an impact on family life.

For example, some employers have developed flexible employment practices that enable their employees, both women and men, to fulfil their family responsibilities; these include easier access to part-time work and the granting of shorter or longer periods of leave in order to care for ill or disabled family members. Such policies may have an impact on the division of unpaid work in families.

2) Family life, which may have an impact on working conditions.

For example, measures such as the introduction of vouchers and tax benefits will improve the financial situation of parents. These financial arrangements may influence the division of paid work as one of the parents, in general the mother, may decide to stay at home or decide to work part-time.

3) Working conditions and family life.

For example, arrangements such as maternity and paternity leave make it easier for parents to adopt different patterns of work after the birth of a child. Again, such measures may have an impact on the division of paid and unpaid work.

These examples suggest that we should not only pay attention to the outcomes of policies expected or intended by policy-makers, but should also include unintended and even perverse effects in any evaluation of policy.

As far as policies on work and the family are concerned, there is some evidence to suggest that certain measures may even have contradictory effects on the division of paid and unpaid work (Fagnani and Buffier-Morel, 1995). Measures intended to create a more egalitarian division of paid work between men and women sometimes have the opposite effect on the division of unpaid work. It is clear that the evaluation of policies should not be restricted to the goals policy makers had in mind at the time the policies were proposed and implemented.

By classifying policies according to criteria such as the kind of facilities they provide, conditions of entitlement and the level of financial resources involved, it may be possible to advance some hypotheses about their possible impact on the division of paid and unpaid work.

The role of policies

The international study on policies and the division of paid and unpaid work to be conducted by the European network will consist of two parts. First, the members of the network in each EU member state will conduct a survey in order to assess the impact of current policy measures on the division of paid and unpaid work in households. Second, a typology of countries will be constructed on the basis of a comparative statistical analysis of the relevant social, institutional and economic forces and the gender division of work.

The aim of the **national studies** is to discover how households respond to policies intended to aid the reconciliation of work and family. In the basic conceptual model to be applied in these studies, the actual use (if any) that households make of policy measures in the area of work and the family is the central independent variable, while the division of work is the dependent variable. As we will be applying the theoretical framework developed by Bourdieu, capital and habitus are considered as two exogenous independent variables. In addition to these micro-variables, the conceptual model contains variables on a macro level, namely the three fields of policy, labour market and family relationships. These fields constitute the relevant, macro-level conditions in any given country, and will be considered as contextual variables. Since they are constants at the micro level, these fields have no formal explanatory function within a national study, but they will play a more substantial role in the comparison of the outcomes of the national studies.

The basic assumptions of the model to be used are:

- a) that households making use of policy measures will have a more egalitarian division of work within the household than those not making use of those measures;
- b) that households with more capital and a modern habitus will be more inclined to use policy measures and will have a more egalitarian division of work than those with less capital and a traditional habitus.

Taking the individual household as the unit of analysis, we consider use of policies as the key independent, explanatory variable, while capital and habitus are the main

competing variables, directly as well as indirectly influencing the dependent variable division of work.

The causal influence of use of policy on division of work, as well as the influence of the competing variables, can be established by making a series of comparisons between subgroups. The basic question to be answered is whether or not a substantial difference can be detected in the division of work between households making use of the relevant policy measures and those not making use of them, when the competing effects of capital and habitus are controlled for.

In order to guarantee an adequate international comparison, the questionnaires, sample designs and data analysis techniques used should be identical. If the results achieved are consistent, it will be possible to answer the central question of whether or not policy measures have a meaningful influence on the division of work within households.

The results of the national studies can be used in two different ways:

- a) Firstly, the impact of national policy measures on a micro level has to be considered in the context of structural and cultural factors (field variables), such as the pattern of female employment, the extent of feminisation in the private and public sectors, the level of part-time work, the dominance of family-oriented values, the social acceptability of women with children working outside the home, etc. Such an analysis may provide some insight into the role of institutional forces, which may in turn contribute to an understanding of the impact of policies observed in any given country.
- b) Secondly, comparison of the results of the various national studies will provide additional information on the impact of different societal conditions on the division of work. Taken in conjunction with the nature and scope of current policies on work and the family, differences in societal conditions may explain why the division of work differs from one country to another.

The international comparative study will be based on the theoretical views of Barrère-Maurisson as outlined earlier in this paper. As well as identifying a specific societal form of the family division of labour in each EU member state, her approach focuses on the emergence of specific forms of 'régulation', that is the balance of social, institutional and economic forces that characterise at a particular time the economic system as a whole or particular parts thereof.

Thus in the case of societal comparison, the primary focus of analysis is society as a whole and its overall coherence. This constitutes a shift from analysis of a single

aspect of the family division of labour, whether at individual, organisational or institutional level, to analysis at the societal level; in other words, it is society as a whole that now becomes the unit of reference. This is the reason for adopting a comparative approach based on variations in the 'societal' forms of the family division of labour. We will then seek to show how analysis of the societal forms of the relationship between work and the family may lead ultimately to a comparative approach to the various forms of macro-social 'régulation'.

This analysis is subject to two guiding principles, both of which are a logical consequence of the concept of society as a total system. The first is that the relationship between work and the family should be regarded as an expression of that system and that efforts should be made to understand the overall coherence of each society and its specific mode of 'régulation'. The second is that the uniqueness of each societal form should be highlighted as an historical and local specification embedded in a given society and period. This provides the basis for comparison of different systems.

Thus the objective is to understand the national characteristics of the phenomenon. Despite their specificity, those characteristics reveal the general nature of the relationship, that is the internal consistency of its underlying principles. There are three stages in the process:

1) What economic, social and institutional factors in each country need to be taken into account in order to construct the societal comparison of the various forms taken by the family division of labour? In our view, there are four such factors:

- a - the dominant type of economic sector (agriculture, manufacturing industry, market services, public services),
- b - the dominant family type (patriarchal, conjugal, one main breadwinner, two equal breadwinners),
- c - the mode of male and female labour force participation, and
- d - the agency that takes main responsibility for household duties (extended or nuclear family, market or collective service organisations).

2) How is the societal form of the family division of labour to be constructed? The brief answer is through analysis of the correlation between the dominant forms of the family and those of the relationship to work (both paid and unpaid). In the Scandinavian countries, for example, a characteristic form of the family division of labour will emerge, the main features of which are fragmented-reconstituted families with two breadwinners, a high level of female labour force participation, an extensive service sector, etc. In this way, it has proved possible to highlight (Barrère-Maurisson and Marchand, 1990) four types of family division of labour that

constitute, in any group of developed countries, four different forms of adjustment between the characteristics of the family and those of the economy.

3) How is the process of 'régulation' at work in each country, that is the underlying principles that produce coherence at the macro-social level, to be detected? The societal forms of the division of labour highlighted earlier constitute the starting point for analysis of the institutions and organisations that work to preserve the overall coherence of each national system. In concrete terms, therefore, what is being investigated here is the role played by, and the relationships between, the various societal actors, including families, firms, organisations, the market and the state. The purpose here is to identify the actor that, at the societal level, plays a pre-eminent role in linking the two spheres (paid and unpaid, private and public) and, in so doing, to reveal the process of 'régulation' at work in each situation. This is the method already used to identify three main modes of 'régulation', in which the family, firms or the market play the predominant role; we have termed these modes the familial, market and political modes of 'régulation'.

WORK - FAMILY AND MODES OF SOCIETAL REGULATION

<i>Variable</i>					<i>Trend</i>
economic sector	agriculture	industry	market services	public services	tertiarisation
work	family	men, industry	women, market services	women, public services	individualisation
type of family	patriarchal family	conjugal family	1 main breadwinner family	2 breadwinner family	break-up
domestic work	extended family	nuclear family	market services	collective services	externalisation
division of work	self-regulation	no sharing	unequal sharing	equal sharing	greater equality
regulatory agent	family	firm	market	State	socialisation
mode of regulation	familial	market	market	political	family → politics
social order	private order	liberal order	liberal order	public order	private → public

Source: M.A. BARRERE-MAURISSON, draft for the *Revue Française de Sociologie*, 12/1996
(amended version of a table published in 1995)

In practice, however, the situation is more complex, especially when several actors are present simultaneously. Several case studies have illustrated how these actors interact with each other in a complex web of relationships, in either a complementary or antagonistic way (Fagnani and Buffier-Morel, 1995).

As well as identifying the different modes of 'régulation' in the various countries, which is necessary for understanding the place of the various institutional actors on the social stage, it is also our aim to reveal the principles of 'régulation' at work. Principles of 'regulation' can be defined as the means by which the activities of the institutional actors are coordinated, resources allocated and conflicts structured. Basically, there are three principles of 'régulation' on which there is broad consensus: authority or hierarchical control, exchange, and solidarity, i.e., cooperation based on shared values and norms (Lange and Regini, 1992: 6). Identification of these principles requires content analysis of a range of documents: national policies, agreements between social partners, reports published by family and voluntary associations, etc.

It is anticipated that the comparative study will result in identification of the national characteristics of the relationship between paid and unpaid work, and in particular of various institutional actors and of regulatory principles, which should be regarded as the forces underlying the link between institutional actors and the corresponding societal forms of the division of labour.

Towards an integrated form of policy evaluation

As we have argued, the two projects are intended to investigate two different questions. The aim of the national studies is to find out how households react to policy measures intended to assist the reconciliation of paid work and family responsibilities, in other words to ascertain the extent to which households modify their division of paid and unpaid work as a result of policies on work and family life. In order to understand the impact of national policies on the division of work in the various countries, we make use of information on the societal context (field variables) which, taken in conjunction with the nature and the scope of these policy measures and their historical embeddedness in the society, can explain why the division of work in households differs between countries. Secondly, the results of the national studies may provide sufficient information to formulate hypotheses about the macro-micro link between, on the one hand, relevant societal factors (including work-family policies), and, on the other, the division of work within households.

The international comparative study focuses on the societal form of the division of labour as a whole and its regulatory principles, which provide information on the logic and the coherence of the division of labour as well as on the role of policies. We regard the societal form of the division of labour as an expression of all the aspects that can be observed at the three different levels (individual, organisational and institutional) of the relationship between work and the family.

As the results of the national studies are to be considered as complementary to the comparative study, we will, finally, outline the possibilities and the limitations of the international societal comparison of the division of labour in order to clarify the merits of our proposal for policy evaluation.

The general framework for evaluating the impact of policies, and thus any ensuing changes, has to fulfil certain conditions. In our view, an approach based on regulatory processes at the societal level makes it possible to uphold several principles:

- 1 - the analytical framework can be dynamic, i.e. it can be used to investigate processes and strategies over time rather than in one particular period (a diachronic rather than a synchronic approach);
- 2 - it allows for comparability (and the two essential sub-principles of generality and specificity) and for
- 3 - multidimensionality (i.e. different levels of analysis - micro-meso-macro -, different actors, different referents).

Such analysis in terms of regulatory processes has its roots in genetic structuralism (Piaget, 1968); the so-called 'régulation' school of macro-economic theory is based on some of its principles (Boyer, 1986). In this approach, the term 'régulation' denotes the ways in which the economic system reproduces itself, and the 'mode of régulation' denotes the series of historical (particularly institutional) procedures through which that reproduction is achieved.

Our objective has been to highlight the modes of 'régulation' that have dominated in particular historical periods, or in separate states, by investigating the matching of dominant family forms with a particular relationship to paid work. These modes of 'régulation' reflect the process of mutual adaptation between the two types of structure involved. As they evolve over time, the links between the two types of structures are maintained through the interaction between the flexible and rigid elements in each set of structures.

By highlighting the predominant forms, it is possible to construct a typology of standard situations, which do not necessarily correspond to any concrete reality.

By its very nature, therefore, such a typology is abstract, in contrast to a (concrete) typology used to classify empirical entities (countries) on the basis that they constitute different states of the same general phenomenon. It is an abstract construction based on the dominant forms of certain phenomena, as revealed through analysis. This is a process akin to Weber's ideal type method, in which the specific characteristics of empirically given structures are revealed through the use of pure concepts, which are intellectual constructs based on the most typical elements of the phenomenon under investigation. In this way, the ideal type is isolated from any historical contingency. This is the meaning of the abstract typology based on 'dominant' forms, each representing a different state of the same phenomenon; in reality, a multiplicity of different forms always coexists at any given point in time. As a result, there is no systematic correlation between any one country and a particular model; each country may contain elements of two different models, since reality is always more complex than any single, pure model.

This is in fact an indication of the specificity (or specificities) of the phenomenon, i.e. its 'discontinuity' from one country to another (cf. Maurice, 1989). In other words, the dominant forms of work, the family etc. are located in a specific historical and local context. This makes it possible to take the analysis further (in order to explain rather than simply understand, as is the case with a strictly concrete comparison of countries), since what is being revealed are the principles underlying the structures observed. This is a true 'societal' comparison, since it highlights systems. Comparisons can then be made between the various elements that constitute this typology and new criteria, new referents and new spheres.

Having taken the first step in the development of a theoretical approach by isolating these underlying principles through a process of induction, the next step is to advance towards generalisation through a process of deductive reasoning (cf. Assier-Andrieu and Commaille, 1995: 13). For example, the relevance of the factor policy (in this case) can be tested, and if it strengthens the model, a more general rule can be deduced, by means of which the validity of that particular factor can be reinforced and its heuristic value verified more fully. In this respect, the models are a vital part of the explanatory process, and it is really very important that they are effective.

Consequently, it is necessary to work towards models, that is the construction of systems, and not remain solely at the level of inputs relating to individual topics. Systems take account of both the specificity and the generality of phenomena. Thus the construction of typologies, integrated into the development of a theoretical framework, is the precondition for the generalisation of knowledge.

Societal comparison, i.e. the comparison of social systems, is based on the fact that each form of the family division of labour, for example, represents a specific example of the relationship that reflects both the particular social context and history of each society. Thus there is both a temporal and a spatial dimension.

These two elements are in fact intertwined: the temporal aspect reflects the fact that each form is an expression of the state of the relationships observed in society at a given time in its history, and the spatial aspect the fact that the analysis is located at the level of the greatest generality, i.e. society as a whole and the national context. Thus each societal form constitutes 'a configuration that is specific to a given country and period of history' (Boyer, 1986). In this sense, a comparative approach is nothing more than analysis of the process of spatial and temporal differentiation.

How does this differentiation take place, how do distinct forms emerge and in what ways is each one specific to a given society? Each country has its own particular history and framework, and produces its own decision-making bodies and categories. Each national community has its own particular ways of articulating social relationships. Thus to compare two countries with each other is to refer to two separate socio-economic spaces, based on the existence of social groups that are not necessarily the same from one country to another. Moreover, each society develops its own decision-making bodies, which is why it is necessary to investigate the practices specific to each system in areas such as 'régulation' of the labour market or policy adjustment. All these elements help to define the nature of employment and the family in each country.

However, while each country has its own social groups, categories and decision-making bodies, and therefore a particular set of social relationships, it also has its own history. It is the accumulated weight of that history that forges the current economic and social environment. Thus, for example, the shift away from agriculture took place at different rates and in different ways in France and in Great Britain, which may explain the different position occupied by women's work in the two countries (Tilly and Scott, 1978). This is why it is necessary to illuminate the process by which each society has developed historically.

Thus it is the combination of all these elements that constitutes the singularity of each state. The specific forms of the relationship to work and of the family for which they serve as a vehicle reveal the way in which, over the course of a country's history, the various levels and decision-making bodies in the social sphere are articulated. Thus the process of articulation, which is itself rooted in the process of constructing a national entity, explains the specific nature of the modes of 'régulation' in each society.

Thus it is necessary to retain both the specific (in each society) and the general. In other words, it is necessary to highlight national specificities, despite the apparent uniqueness of the phenomenon - for some, the wage-employment relationship (*rapport salarial*) (Maurice, Sellier and Silvestre, 1982: 10), for us, the family division of labour. This is how we have attempted to reveal the coherence of the phenomenon, despite the apparent specificity, thus creating the basis for generalisation. This places us clearly within the Durkheimian tradition of comparability, in which the question of the permanence and variability of social phenomena plays a fundamental part.

This is why it is necessary to specify the context. Since relationships with the external environment are one of the factors that help to shape each of the social spaces, it is essential to define the context of which they are a part. This is precisely the so-called 'contextual' principle of analysis used by Durkheim in *Suicide* in order to study the effect of divorce on the suicide rate by introducing a third, country-specific variable, in this case the legislation on divorce (Boudon and Lazarsfeld, 1966, section IV). It is also the basis of ethnological analyses of cultural, as distinct from natural phenomena. In our view, therefore, the cultural aspect (i.e. the fact of being embedded in a specific context) explains the changing forms of phenomena observed in different places.

Thus it is always necessary to locate phenomena in their local context, which means highlighting the specific local conditions that have helped to shape the family division of labour. From this point of view, individual countries are in effect so many localised social spaces, the specific characteristics of which have to be revealed since they help to give phenomena their particular form and to ensure that the societal mode of regulation retains its characteristic coherence.

It is only under these conditions that specificity can be said to contain an element of generality that goes beyond mere contingency (Maurice, 1994). In other words, all systems are local, but their level of generality can be raised by systematic comparison (Friedberg, 1993: 21).

Nevertheless, in the case of European comparisons, it is not sufficient, in our view, to specify the context of each society. We need to go beyond national boundaries and examine the supranational framework formed by the European Union.

The emergence of a new actor

One final remark concerns the emergence of a new political space. The supranatio-

nal European entity may indeed constitute a new context. In any event, it certainly constitutes a new framework that has its own reality and that calls into question the sociological categories traditionally used to deal with nation states.

It is one thing to observe the development of a European entity, but quite another to conceptualise it. Nevertheless, the two must be conceived of in tandem (Kuhn, 1972: 75), since only through a process of conceptualisation can the notion become a tool for the analysis of change.

In earlier studies (Barrère-Maurisson, 1995: 83), we advanced the hypothesis that it is through investigation of modes of 'régulation' and their evolution that the various forms of social cohesion, described variously as communalist, associative and administrative, are brought to light. This in turn, we suggested, reflected specific relationships to nationality, namely union, association and delegation, and opened the way for a further phase in which a relationship to supranationality would emerge.

Supranationality has to be accompanied by a process of conceptualisation, or reconstruction, since it represents a new relationship to the nation state. Quite apart from the economic, institutional and social effects it will have (and which are an indication of new social practices), the emergence of a supranational entity in Europe raises the question of how to redefine the social actors and social spaces, and the relationships between them. In this respect, the task we face is the sociological one of reconstructing of epistemological categories.

Who are the new actors, and what are the new relationships that are emerging? That is the first question. Another is: what definition, or redefinition, of the nation, of the State and of the supranational entity is to be adopted?

Are we witnessing, at least in some countries, particularly European ones, a transition from 'régulation' by the State (i.e. national 'régulation') to a more complex mode of 'régulation', which might best be described as 'multipartite', in the sense that it involves not only the traditional actors involved in earlier modes of regulation (the family, the firm, trade unions, the market and the State) but also the new supranational actor? If this is the case, all the social agents operating in the public arena are a product of institutions. This is why the role of policy can henceforth be studied at the meso level (local authorities, regions etc.).

Ultimately, the development of an integrated approach, in this case a typology of models, will equip us with the means to identify the various social levels brought into play by a particular policy. The models thus defined are located at both the

micro (individuals, families, social categories) and macro (groups regions, countries) levels. They reflect sets of underlying principles, which in turn reveals the place and role of the policy in question. This is what makes it possible to evaluate their impact, since the effects, obstacles and possible action programmes can be analyzed within the framework of these sets of principles. To put it more precisely, to evaluate the impact of a policy is to integrate it as an institutional factor into the interplay of various modes of societal 'régulation'.

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